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## NF91-45 Ramie

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## Ramie

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Ramie (pronounced Ray-me) is one of the oldest vegetable fibers and has been used for thousands of years. It was used for Chinese burial shrouds over 2,000 years ago, long before cotton was introduced in the Far East.

Ramie is classified chemically as a cellulose fiber, just as cotton, linen, and rayon. Leading producers of ramie are China, Taiwan, Korea, the Philippines and Brazil.

Until recently ramie has been unknown in the ready-to-wear market in this country, but it is appearing in more garments. It is often blended with cotton and available in woven and knit fabrics that resemble fine linen to coarse canvas.

Ramie usage increased in the mid-1980s with a fashion emphasis on natural fibers and a loophole in textile import regulations. Ramie, and garments made of more than 50 percent ramie, entered the United States without import quota limits. Legislation was passed in 1986 eliminating the quota-free status of ramie.

Ramie is also known as China-grass, rhea and grasscloth. The fibers are found in the bark of the stalk. The process of transforming ramie fiber into fabric is similar to manufacturing linen from flax. The fiber is very fine and silk-like, naturally white in color and has a high luster.

### **Advantages of Ramie**

- Resistant to bacteria, mildew, and insect attack.
- Extremely absorbent.
- Dyes fairly easy.
- Increases in strength when wet.
- Withstands high water temperatures during laundering.
- Smooth lustrous appearance improves with washing.
- Keeps its shape and does not shrink.
- Can be bleached.

## **Disadvantages of Ramie**

- Low in elasticity.
- Lacks resiliency.
- Low abrasion resistance.
- Wrinkles easily.
- Stiff and brittle.

## **Ramie as a Blend**

Ramie is most often blended with other fibers for its unique strength, absorbency, luster and dye-affinity. When blended with high-quality cotton it offers increased luster, strength and color. When mixed with wool, ramie adds lightness and minimizes shrinkage. When blended with rayon, it offsets the low wet strength.

## **Uses of Ramie**

Ramie is used in fabrics resembling linen, such as apparel fabrics for shirts and shorts, tablecloths, napkins, and handkerchiefs. It is often found as a blend with cotton in knit sweaters. Ramie is also used in fish nets, canvas, upholstery fabrics, straw hats and fire hose.

## **Care of Ramie**

Ramie-blend fabrics can be laundered or drycleaned depending on the dyes, finishes, and garment design. The care label will state the preferred method. The drycleaning method helps preserve the beauty of woven ramie items and gives best color and shape retention and a wrinkle-free appearance. With caution, white ramie fabrics may be bleached with chlorine-type bleaches. Ramie fabrics withstand ironing temperatures up to 400 to 450 degrees F, or the cotton setting on an iron.

When storing ramie or ramie blends, lay them flat. Ramie fibers are brittle and tend to break. Avoid folding the garment or pressing sharp creases in woven fabrics.

## **Research Studies With Ramie**

Sweaters of 55 percent ramie/ 45 percent cotton and 100 percent cotton were laundered using various care procedures at Iowa State University.

Change in sweater size varied. Flat drying-resulted in growth of the sweater both vertically and horizontally. For both sweater types, less change in size occurred when the sweaters were machine washed and at least partially machine dried. The hand of the sweaters was affected by drying method. Flat drying resulted in a harsher and stiffer feel regardless of sweater type. Machine drying created a more pronounced texture. Using a fabric softener produced a positive hand for both sweater types.

Neither sweater type maintained its size or retained a positive hand when cleaned by the method recommended on the care label. The question is raised "What aspects are considered when determining the appropriate care label?"

Louisiana State University evaluated different laundering procedures as to the dimensional stability of ramie-containing knit fabrics. Consumers can expect a minimal shrinkage in the width and minimal growth in the length for sweaters made of ramie and ramie/cellulosic blends. There is no apparent

advantage to hand washing over machine washing of ramie and ramie-blend knits. Ramie blend knits of cotton or rayon perform better when tumble dried to maintain garment dimensions.

## **References**

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